

Which Bible Translation(s) Should I Use?

July 16, 2023

All Bible translations can be put on a spectrum between 1 and 100, with 1 representing perfect formal equivalence and 100 representing perfect dynamic equivalence. In other words, the lower the number is, the more literal the translation is. Here are the numbers that I would assign to the translations we've covered so far:

- New American Standard Bible (NASB): 17 (10th grade)
- Revised Standard Version (RSV): 22 (11th grade)
- American Standard Version (ASV): 12 (12th grade)
- King James Version (KJV): 15 (12th grade)

The New International Version was published in 1973 (New Testament) and 1978 (whole Bible). Then a minor revision was done in 1984. It was theologically sound like the NASB, but it was more readable because it utilized dynamic equivalence far more frequently. By the mid-1980s it surpassed the KJV as the best-selling English Bible translation.

Here are some examples of dynamic equivalence in the 1984 NIV:

- ““But I gave you also cleanness of teeth in all your cities, And lack of bread in all your places; Yet you have not returned to Me,’ declares the LORD” (Amos 4:6 NASB).
- ““I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned to me,’ declares the LORD” (Amos 4:6 NIV 1984).

Here are some examples of dynamic equivalence in the 1984 NIV:

- “You husbands in the same way, live with *your wives* in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, *since she is* a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered” (1 Peter 3:7 NASB).
- “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers” (1 Peter 3:7 NIV 1984).

Here are some examples of dynamic equivalence in the 1984 NIV:

- “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world” (1 John 2:16 NASB).
- “For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world” (1 John 2:16 NIV 1984).

Here are some examples of formal equivalence in the 1984 NIV:

- “Blessed is the person who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!” (Psalm 1:1 NASB).
- “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers” (Psalm 1:1 NIV 1984).

Here are some examples of formal equivalence in the 1984 NIV:

- “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:41 NASB).
- “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:41 NIV 1984).

In 1992 the translators of the NIV started working on a new edition that was more gender-inclusive, and it was finished in 1996. It was called the New International Version: Inclusive Language Edition (NIVI). This edition was published only in the UK. But in 1997 World Magazine reported that there were plans to make a gender-neutral revision of the NIV in the US. This translation was called Today's New International Version (TNIV). It was published in 2002 (New Testament) and 2005 (whole Bible).

But most people who used the 1984 NIV didn't switch to the TNIV because it had many questionable changes. So in 2009 a decision was made to discontinue both the 1984 NIV and the TNIV and to replace them with a revised NIV. This new edition was published in 2011, and it preserved most of the changes in the TNIV.

But some of the changes in the 2011 NIV were good.

Here are some examples:

- “Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 19:10 NIV 1984).
- “Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 19:10 NIV 2011).

But some of the changes in the 2011 NIV were good.

Here are some examples:

- “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20b–21 NIV 1984).
- “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst” (Luke 17:20b–21 NIV 2011).

But some of the changes in the 2011 NIV were good.

Here are some examples:

- “Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty’” (John 6:35 NIV 1984).
- “Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty’” (John 6:35 NIV 2011).

But some of the changes in the 2011 NIV were good.

Here are some examples:

- “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law” (Romans 3:28 NIV 1984).
- “For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law” (Romans 3:28 NIV 2011).

But some of the changes in the 2011 NIV were good.

Here are some examples:

- “In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything” (1 Timothy 3:11 NIV 1984).
- “In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything” (1 Timothy 3:11 NIV 2011).

But some of the changes in the 2011 NIV were good.

Here are some examples:

- “For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world” (1 John 2:16 NIV 1984).
- “For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world” (1 John 2:16 NIV 2011).